

Get Organized

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Getting yourself and the kids out the door on time in the morning, fighting traffic jams on the expressway on the way home, getting berated daily by the boss because work isn't finished in a timely manner: all of these are stress nightmare scenarios. What do they lack that would help? A look at the bigger picture and organization. Read on.

6 Tips for Better Time Management

Learn how to make time to smell the roses.

By [John Casey](#)
WebMD Feature

Reviewed By [Michael Smith, MD](#)

The simple, unpleasant truth is that we are probably busier than we ever have been. Notwithstanding the fact that little science backs up this notion, the anecdotal evidence is overwhelming.

"You can see it all around us," says Jana Jasper, a New York-based productivity expert and author of *Take Back Your Time*. "People talk too fast. We're always in a rush. We start things and don't finish them and are constantly nagged by the idea that we've forgotten to do something, but we're not sure what it is." That people awash in labor- and time-saving devices, from robotic vacuum cleaners to microwave ovens to computers, would feel so harried so often seems counterintuitive. But what technology gives, it also takes away.

"As we have increased the numbers of time-saving devices and products to make our lives easier we have found ways to fill the time," says Tracy Lyn Moland a time management consultant and author of *Mom Management, Managing Mom Before Everybody Else*. And a chronic lack of time leads to stress.

But the time-management experts we spoke to all say that it is possible to reduce stress. Think about it as adding an extra hour to your day through time-management techniques.

Something as simple as "knowing where your keys are in the morning, knowing where your kid's library book or homework is, will reduce a lot of stress," says Moland. She has a number of time management tips.

Make a Time Diary

Take a week and plot out what you do every day. Be honest. If you watch 25 hours of TV each week, write it down.

"This is a painful awakening for most people," says Jana Jasper. "You have to include everything --- gym time, eating, driving, weekly meetings, all of it. It can be upsetting to see how little unstructured time we allow ourselves. But it's difficult to make intelligent decisions about using your time more effectively if you don't know what you're doing with your time now."

Learn to Say "No"

Turn off your cell phone and beeper. When someone asks you to do something that you really don't have time to do, say so, politely, but firmly. And don't allow yourself to feel guilty.

"One reason we are feeling so busy all the time is that we are worse at setting personal boundaries around what we'll say 'no' to," says Jana Kemp, founder and president of Meeting & Management Essentials, a time-management consultancy in Boise, Idaho.

Part of declining to do things, is focusing on your goals, Kemp explains. Your time diary can help in this regard. Once you've blocked time for important, but often not scheduled activities, sign on for only those things that are important, family, friends and health. Once you know exactly what you have time to do, turning down things that don't fit into your priorities is easier.

Time-Based, To-Do List

"Create a to-do list that includes how much time you'll spend on each item on the list," says Moland. Lists are always helpful, but when you add how much time each task should take, it helps prioritize how you go about the tasks. When you prioritize tasks you naturally focus on those that you can do immediately.

Let Your Computer Help

Technology helped get you into the time bind in the first place, so use it to help get you out. Try some of the many personal scheduling software programs that allow you to keep a calendar, "to-do" lists, and phone and address books on your computer.

"It's not enough to be efficient anymore," said Jasper. "The goal here is to use the technology to get rid of all the paper in your life. I can't stress enough how important this is."

Much of organizing, these experts say, comes from streamlining your life. The more clutter you have in your life -- phone numbers on slips of paper, business cards in notebooks, a desk piled high with calendars and lists -- the more likely you are to waste time trying to stay organized and on top of things,

Multitask

Is there a more overused buzzword today? We all combine several activities into one all the time. Some multitasking is dangerous. Talk on the phone while driving and your chances of being involved in a traffic accident rise dramatically. That being said, lots of activities can be effectively and safely combined. Listen to books on tape while commuting. When you watch television, pay your bills.

"Women are better able to multitask than men," said Moland. "Even if both partners work full time, the woman usually is able to still think about the children's schedule, the home, the meals. Men are better able to focus in on one task at a time -- and women can learn from this at times."

Don't Be a Perfectionist

There's nothing wrong with being ordinary. Perfectionism, otherwise known as paying excessive attention to every detail, important or not, is a kind of procrastination.

"Set rational goals for yourself," says Jasper. "It's a fine thing to strive to be your best. It's counter productive to try to be the very best."

Setting unattainable expectations of yourself just adds stress to your life, Kemp explains.

Reward Yourself

Finally, don't let any progress, however small, go unrewarded.

"Use your time diary to make decisions about how you want to organize your time better," said Jasper. "As you make progress in prioritizing and saying 'no,' let yourself enjoy that. It doesn't have to be a big reward, maybe it can be as simple as spending some time by yourself or getting a massage. It's important to acknowledge and enjoy your success."

John Casey is a freelance lifestyle, health, and science writer in New York City.
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SOURCES: Tracy Lyn Moland, time-management consultant; speaker; author, *Mom Management, Managing Mom Before Everybody Else*. Jana Kemp, founder and president, Meeting & Management Essentials in Boise, Idaho. Jana Jasper, productivity expert, New York; author, *Take Back Your Time*."

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